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12 August 1968

MEMORANDUM FOR: SB/C

ATTENTION : []

SUBJECT : Activities of the Ukrainian minority in
Czechoslovakia

SOURCE OF INFO: AECASSOWARY/29

1. In response to an invitation from a Ukrainian youth group in Bratislava, several young students from the West travelled to Czechoslovakia to participate in a gathering of Ukrainian students from 19 to 29 June in Bratislava, Svydnyk and Presov. A/29 is waiting for a report from the son of a collaborator in Munich, who along with his wife was present at the gathering. Others who travelled to the CSSR to participate in the meeting were two American students from Minneapolis who now are studying in Germany, a Canadian citizen, and a young man from Philadelphia. The latter mailed a card from Czechoslovakia on 29 June saying that he was going to see CHERVONENKO, the Soviet Ambassador in Prague, about a visa to the Ukraine. A local newspaper interviewed the Western students and promised to publish the text of the interview. About 25 Ukrainians in Czechoslovakia submitted their names and addresses and requested that literature be mailed to them from the West.

2. On 22-23 June there was a Festival of Ukrainian Ensembles in Svydnyk. There were two ensembles from the Ukraine and over 1600 individual participants. The festival turned out to be a Ukrainian national manifestation. There were over 30,000 visitors to the festival, not only from Czechoslovakia but also from the Ukraine, Poland and Yugoslavia. A seminar of Ukrainianists was held simultaneously with the festival. A committee was appointed to draft and present an appeal to Kiev to request permission to establish an international

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Association of Ukrainians in Kiev with a branch in Presov. If Kiev turns down the request, an international association will be established in Presov. A plan was adopted to hold a conference in 1969 to discuss the development of Ukrainian national consciousness.

3. A/29 was asked whether he knew anything about Vasyl' BILYAK, Slovak Communist Party head. He said BILYAN is a Ukrainian, a former tailor, who completed Party schooling and claims to have a Ph.D. from the school. Although of Ukrainian origin, his sentiments toward Ukrainians are weak. As an example of BILYAK's treatment of Ukrainians, A/29 told about a conference scheduled for 25 May in Presov to establish a Ukrainian National Council. Ukrainians from Prague were already enroute to Presov when BILYAK telephoned local leaders and threatened that if the meeting was not called off things would be made difficult for the Ukrainian community. BILYAK, is considered by Ukrainians to be a typical Party apparatchik. SVOBODA, on the other hand, is generally friendly toward the Ukrainians. About 60-70% of his army was made up of Ukrainians and many of his present friends are those with whom he established friendships during the war days.

4. A/29 said that over 500 volumes of literature have been mailed to the Ukrainian community in Presov in recent months, including complete sets of Suchasnist, beginning with 1962. This literature was requested by the Ukrainians there, who said this was the time to get as much in to them as possible so that the literature could be made available to Soviet Ukrainians as opportunities present themselves. Receipt of the literature has been acknowledged in every instance. Most of the literature was mailed but quite a bit was carried by travellers. The students, for instance, who attended the gathering in June, took some literature with them and encountered no problems.

[SB/CA]